

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) An apparatus ~~[[15]]~~ for treatment of foodstuffs for processing and subsequent drying, comprising

an endless conveyor belt ~~[(2)]~~ which along part of its length follows a helical path to form a stack ~~[(3)]~~, said helical path defining a central space ~~[(11)]~~ in the stack ~~[(3)]~~,

the conveyor belt ~~[(2)]~~ having passages for letting a flow of a gaseous medium in the vertical as well as horizontal direction through the stack ~~[(3)]~~,

~~characterised by~~

an end portion of the stack ~~[(3)]~~, in which said stack is vertically surrounded by an encapsulation ~~[(22)]~~,

a first ~~means ~~[(26)]~~ for supplying~~ supply of a first gaseous medium to said central space ~~[(11)]~~, and

a second ~~means ~~[(29)]~~ for supplying~~ supply of a second gaseous medium to said encapsulation ~~[(22)]~~,

said encapsulation ~~[(22)]~~ being arranged to direct the flow of the second gaseous medium in such a manner that it is passed in the vertical direction from said encapsulation ~~[(22)]~~ to the rest of the stack ~~[(3)]~~.

2. (Currently Amended) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which the first gaseous medium is humid water vapour ~~[(P1)]~~.

3. (Currently Amended) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which the first gaseous medium is saturated water vapour ~~[(PI)]~~.

4. (Currently Amended) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which the second gaseous medium is overheated water vapour ~~[(P2)]~~.

5. (Currently Amended) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which said encapsulation ~~[(22)]~~ is arranged at the upper part of the stack ~~[(3)]~~.

6. (Currently Amended) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which a first end closure [(16)] is arranged to cover the conveyor belt [(2)] at the upper edge of the encapsulation [(22)].

7. (Currently Amended) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which a second end closure [(17)] is arranged over the central space [(11)].

8. (Currently Amended) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which lateral pieces [(7a, 7b)] at a longitudinal edge of the conveyor belt [(2)] form an outer wall of the stack [(3)], which defines the stack outwards in the radial direction.

9. (Currently Amended) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which lateral pieces [(7a, 7b)] at a longitudinal edge of the conveyor belt [(2)] form an inner wall [(9)] of the stack [(3)] which defines the stack inwards in the radial direction to define said central space [(11)].

10. (Currently Amended) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which a third end closure [(18)] is arranged against the lowermost turn formed in the stack, said third end closure being arranged transversely of the central space [(11)] defined by the conveyor belt [(2)].

11. (Currently Amended) An apparatus as claimed in claim 2 [[or 3]], in which the ~~first means (26) for supplying~~ source of supply of humid ~~or saturated~~ water vapour [(P1)] comprises a fan [(28)].

12. (Currently Amended) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which the conveying direction [(V)] of the conveyor belt [(2)] is arranged towards the encapsulation [(22)].

13. (Currently Amended) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which the stack [(3)] is arranged in a housing [(23)] comprising an inlet [(24)] and an outlet [(25)] for the conveyor belt [(2)].

14. (Currently Amended) An apparatus as claimed in claim 13, in which the housing [(23)] further comprises a drain for draining off condensed water vapour.

15. (Currently Amended) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which the encapsulation [(22)] has one outer and one inner circumferential wall having the same height, vertically surrounding a portion of the stack [(3)].

16. (Currently Amended) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which the encapsulation [(22)] has one outer circumferential wall extending vertically along the full height of the stack [(3)], and one inner circumferential wall extending vertically along a portion of the stack, whereby said outer circumferential wall ~~preferably~~ optionally has openings or perforations along the portion of the stack [(3)] not covered by the inner circumferential wall.

17. (Currently Amended) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which the encapsulation [(22)] has one outer and one inner circumferential wall extending along the full height of the stack [(3)], whereby both walls have openings or perforations along a portion of the stack [(3)].

18. (Currently Amended) A method for treating foodstuffs for the purpose of processing and drying, comprising: ~~the following steps~~

(a) providing an endless conveyor belt [(2)] which along part of its length follows a helical path to form a stack [(3)], said conveyor belt [(2)] having passages for letting a flow of a gaseous medium through the stack [(3)] in the vertical as well as the horizontal direction, directions, wherein:

(i) the stack [(3)] defining a central space [(11)], and

(ii) the stack [(3)] comprising a lower non-encapsulated stack portion [(21)] and, adjacent thereto, an upper stack portion [(20)] which is encapsulated in the vertical direction by an encapsulation [(22)],

(b) supplying a flow of a first gaseous medium to said central space [(11)] for further conveyance to the non-encapsulated stack portion [(20)] through said passages for letting through a flow of a first gaseous medium in the horizontal direction,

(c) supplying a flow of a second gaseous medium to said upper encapsulated stack portion [(20)],

(d) wherein said encapsulation [(22)] directing the flow of the second gaseous medium in such a manner that it flows in an essentially vertical direction from said encapsulated stack portion [(20)] to said non-encapsulated stack portion [(21)], and

(e) the flow of the second gaseous medium, which enters the encapsulated stack portion [(20)] and flows essentially vertically downwards, affecting the flow of the first gaseous medium which is conveyed to the non-encapsulated stack portion [(21)] so that the first gaseous medium is prevented from flowing towards the encapsulated stack portion [(20)].

19. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 18, in which the first gaseous medium is humid water vapour [(P1)].

20. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 18, in which the first gaseous medium is saturated water vapour [(P1)].

21. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 18, in which the second gaseous medium is overheated water vapour [(P2)].

22. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 18, comprising the step of arranging the conveyor belt in a conveying direction [(V)] towards the encapsulated stack portion [(20)].

23. (New) An apparatus as claimed in claim 3, in which the source of supply of saturated water vapor comprises a fan.